

March 22, 1973

Shortgrass operators are stunned. Rains have been falling in between follow-up rains. The ground hasn't been dry for six months. Grass has covered bare spots that were once too hard to absorb the sunlight.

Sheep's response to the wet weather has been normal. In a drouth, the woolies need rain to do anything good; in rainy times, the old sisters pine away their health, longing for a dry spell.

As long as I've been out here, I still can't say what conditions are best for the sheep at this ranch. Dust storms make them blind and green feed gives them pinkeye. On good years they eat bitterweed to purge their systems; in hard years they eat bitterweed to satisfy their appetite.

It seems that the Good. Lord is doing His best to spell out that we shouldn't run the beasts, yet every summer I tear off to buy more of them.

We started last fall with 400 old ewes in a pasture that had been vacant for three months. At the rate they have been expiring since the last snow, the pasture is going to be vacant again by spring.

Soil conservation men don't even know what it's like to practice a deferment by death program. Bankers do, but grass managers haven't had that thrill.

The ewes have what is known as the mortal wobbling disease. By injecting large doses of combiotics and feeding peagreen alfalfa free choice, around six percent of the mildest cases can be saved long enough to abort their lambs and slip their wool. Animal health clinics can beat that percentage by using the same methods used in Houston hospitals. However, they can't perform consistently.

March is by far the weakest time in the Shortgrass Country. It takes the other 11 months to haul off what's checked in the hospital traps during that period. I've always felt that if St. Valentine's Day fell in March, the valentine envelopes would be edged in black. It's a mighty dreary time for the herds and the herdsmen.

Sheep experts have been advising us for years to carry on a strict wool grading program. They sure could get their way in that pasture I was telling you about. There's enough slipped wool and dead wool lying around the waterings to keep a young wool grader busy for the rest of the season.

The crows have been able to build the plushiest nests in their history. Ecologists have been going around bragging how much they love nature. I wonder how many of those easy-crys ever furnished part of their summer wages to make a crow a carpet to nest upon. I'll bet we have the best crow crop in the country.

When wool was selling for 20 cents a pound instead of the dollar- past mark, the strongest blacksmith in the country couldn't have knocked over a sheep with his best hammer. On today's boom, the morning dew fevers them enough to make them lose their fleeces. I knew it was going to be hard to get it into the sacks when it became valuable. That's always the case.

I have started back to gathering dead wool. The way this spring is going, I should have the leverage to control that commodity by June. I never have heard of a dead wool baron, but Mrs. Jackie Onassis never had ridden a Greek ship until she was grown, and look how well she turned out.

Go on and make fun of gathering dead wool, if you want to. Once the Japs hear of it, the ships will be steaming into port. They've already bought everything that the oval eyes can produce. Oriental checkbooks would not need to be retooled to buy all the dead wool.

A man could clean up until they learned about adding bones and rocks in the middle of the sacks. But those foreign boys probably wouldn't be as cranky as dead wool buyers used to be in this country.

Weeds are ready to burst from the wet ground. The winter snows have broken the earth's crust into a perfect seedbed: By May, a rich turf is going to cover everything except the spots where predatory animals are packing the trails.

I really shouldn't complain, because what's left are going to bring a lot of money.